Vietnam Same If Kennedy Had Lived: George Ball

LONDON (AP) — A former high official in the Kennedy administration said Sunday that the American position in Vietnam probably would be no different now if President John F. Kennedy had lived.

George W. Ball, who served under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in the State Department until resigning as undersecretary last fall, was interviewed by an international panel of newsmen on the program "Meet The Press."

He was a replacement for Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who was to have appeared in Washington and been questioned via satellite. Because of the strike of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, Rusk refused to appear.

Ball was in Paris on private business, the newsmen were in London and Washington, and the program was relayed by satellite Ball, now returned to practice as an international lawyer, was asked whether he thought the U.S. position in Vietnam would be any different if Kennedy were now conducting policy.

"I don't believe it. I think we'd have come to very much the same position," Ball replied.

He said president Johnson had the same advisers, Rusk and Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, and he added that Kennedy himself "had made the hard decision," especially the decision to increase the force of American advisers in Vietnam several years ago. That, he said, started U.S. policy there in its present direction.

Ball, speaking as a private citizen, gave full support to Johnson's policy in the war and insisted that if the United States were to stop bombing North Vietnam it could only happen on the basis of some reciprocal gesture by that country's Communist government.

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